



Confronting Discriminatory Backlash after Paris and San Bernardino



To confront the recent backlash against Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Americans following the deeply tragic events in Paris and San Bernardino, officials at the Department of Justice – and across the Federal government – have spoken out loudly and unequivocally against discrimination, violence, and harassment targeting people because of what they look like, which country they come from, or where they worship.

- Community members and advocates have reported an uptick in hate-related incidents targeting Muslim Americans, as well as those perceived as Muslim. We continue to investigate many of these incidents.
- [Speaking from the Oval Office last month](#), President Obama reminded the American people that, “If we’re to succeed in defeating terrorism we must enlist Muslim communities as some of our strongest allies, rather than push them away through suspicion and hate.”
- Vanita Gupta, head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, [spoke at a White House convening on religious pluralism](#) and addressed the recent backlash against Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Americans following the deeply tragic events in Paris and San Bernardino. She highlighted how “this discriminatory backlash not only threatens the millions of Muslims in the United States who peacefully practice their religion. It threatens all of us, because Muslims – like all Americans – work in our local businesses, teach in our schools, compete on our sports teams, and risk their lives in defense of our country.”
- The Civil Rights Division also participated in a [webinar sponsored by FEMA last month](#) to help prepare houses of worship for emergencies by reviewing available resources. More than 1,900 clergy and religious community leaders watched the webinar.
- During the last two months, the Justice Department [brought charges against a Florida man](#) for threatening to firebomb an Islamic Center and a Connecticut man for [firing a high-powered rifle at a mosque](#). Last month, a Missouri man also pleaded guilty to violating the civil rights of others by [leading a conspiracy to deface a local Islamic Center with graffiti and burn two copies of the Qur’an](#).
- John Walsh, U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado, affirmed in a [Denver Post op-ed](#) that even as the Justice Department’s top priority is “to protect our people and our national security,” we must also ensure, “that our legitimate fears do not cause us to react against an entire group of law-abiding people: the members of our Muslim-American communities.”
- John R. Parker, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas, [wrote an op-ed in the Dallas Morning News](#), acknowledging how “recent and horrific terror attacks around the world have resulted in a regrettable and divisive rhetoric, and unlawful conduct in some corners, throwing millions of law-abiding and patriotic Arab and Muslim Americans, as well as others perceived to be Muslim, into the frightening reality of feeling unsafe and threatened right here in the communities we share.”
- Echoing the sentiments of his colleagues, Barry Grissom, U.S. Attorney for the District of Kansas, [issued a statement that emphasized our shared commitment to reject discrimination](#): “Just as it is the responsibility of Muslims around the world to root out misguided ideals that lead to radicalization, it is the responsibility of all Americans of every faith to reject discrimination.” He highlighted that, “as Americans we must not let fear drive us to hateful and divisive acts toward Muslims in this country.”
- [In a Dear Colleague Letter to educational leaders](#), Secretary of Education Arne Duncan wrote, “We cannot permit discrimination or harassment in schools against students based on their actual or perceived race, religion, or national origin. Moreover, because parents and students look to you for leadership, their hearing from you that such conduct is unconditionally wrong and will not be tolerated in our schools will make a real difference.”
- To combat discrimination in the workplace, Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Jenny R. Yang [issued a statement, along with instructive resource documents, to highlight this unequivocal message](#): “We urge all employees to re-affirm these values of tolerance and equality in their interactions with their co-workers and show that harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated in America’s workplaces.”